

## Andrew Jackson to Henry Lee, October 7, 1825, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

### TO MAJOR HENRY LEE.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Major Lee was the unsteady son of Gen. Henry Lee, of the Revolutionary army. He was a feverish hack writer for political leaders and a needy office seeker. In the campaign of 1828 he was closely attached to Jackson and wrote in his behalf. He planned a life of Jackson and actually began to write it. In 1825, before he was completely identified with Jackson's cause, Adams appointed him Assistant Postmaster General, which brought out a severe attack in the Nashville *Republican*. Sept. 11 he wrote a letter in defense of his action, saying that he was still a Jackson man and that McLean, Postmaster General, was not hostile to Jackson, although he preferred Adams. It was a long letter, and in it Lee admitted his own private errors. Jackson's reply, which here appears, is notable for its breadth of feeling on a subject which he might have viewed with less good nature.

Hermitage, October 7, 1825.

. . . . I much regret the attack made upon you in the Nashville Republican which you have detailed in your letter before me. Altho, the editor of that paper, Mr Murray, was friendly to my election as President, and is esteemed as a private friend, still I assure you I have never been in his printing office in my life, nor on any occasion have I suggested, or attempted to regulate, the course pursued by him as public printer. In that capacity like ourselves, he is amenable to the tribunal of the public, where he ought to be adjudged upon his own merits. It is to be lamented that of late this tribunal is a mask from which too much slander and abuse are directed against the character, public and private, of almost all those who are brought before it. Such however seems to be the morals of the

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times, to which source I assure you, I at once attributed the aspersions to which you called my attention, and not to any change of principle inferrable from the acceptance of the appointment now held by you. Since the receipt of your letter I have made some enquiry of a friend on the subject, and find that Mr Murray had received the letter referred to in his publication, and withheld it from the public until the one made its appearance in the Richmond enquirer with comments, when he gave the one he had recd a place in his paper.

I am pleased to read your sentiments with regard to the support due to the administration so far as its measures may redound to the prosperity of our common country. Mr Adams is the Constitutional President and as such I would myself be the last man in the Commonwealth to oppose him upon any other ground than that of principle. How he reached the office is an enquiry for the succeeding canvass, when the principles of the constitution, apart from his ministerial acts, or at least without necessary opposition to them, will sanction the investigation. As to his character also, it is hardly necessary for me to observe, that I had esteemed him as a virtuous, able and honest man; and when rumour was stamping the sudden union of his and the friends of Mr Clay with intrigue, barter and bargain I did not, nay, I could not believe that Mr Adams participated in a management deserving such epithets. Accordingly when the election was terminated, I manifested publicly a continuation of the same high opinion of his virtue, and of course my disbelief of his having had knowledge of the pledges, which many men of high standing boldly asserted to be the price of his election. But when these strange rumours became facts, when the predicted stipulation was promptly fulfilled, and Mr Clay was Secretary of State, the inference was irresistible—I could not doubt the facts. It was well known that during the canvass Mr Clay had denounced him as an apostate, as one of the most dangerous men in the union, and the last man in it that ought to be brought into the executive chair. This denunciation was made publicly as I was informed by Govr Duval, and taken into view with the publication relative to the treaty of Ghent, when the nomination was made to the Senate. I do not think the human mind can resist the conviction that the whole prediction

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was true, and that Mr Adams by the redemption of the pledge stood at once before the American people as a participant in the disgraceful traffic of Congressional votes for executive office. From that moment I withdrew all intercourse with him, not however to oppose his administration when I think it useful to the country—here feeble as my aid may be it will always be freely given. But I withdrew in accordance with another principle not at all in conflict with such a course. It is that which regulating the morals of society, to superior office would invite *virtue unrespected*, and in the private relations of life forbids an association with those whom we believe corrupt or capable of cherishing vice when it ministers to selfish aggrandisement.

Still Sir, I am too charitable to believe that the acceptance of an Office under Mr Adams is either evidence of a. change of principle, or of corruption, and I entertain the same opinion of you now, and of your adherence to political honesty that I ever did. Every freeman has a right to his opinion of both men and things, and it is his bounden duty to exercise it fearlessly and candidly. This liberty of opinion is the best boon of freemen, and he that makes it the agent of the greatest good establishes the most unquestionable claims upon the gratitude and love of his country.

I am very respectfully yr mo ob servt